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LENIN, GORSHKOV AND CLAUSEWITZ, (U)

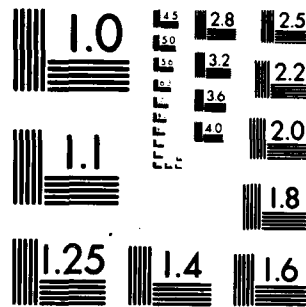
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LENIN, GORSHKOV AND CLAUSEWITZ

[Heydemann, Guenther; Lenin, Gorschkow und Clausewitz; Marineforum No. 11, 1981; pp. 367-372; German]

"A strange way to philosophize, but considering the subject a very good one! /367* That fellow has a common sense which borders on being funny!--A star of the first magnitude!"¹, which is how Marx and Engels judged Clausewitz.

Lenin also made fun of Clausewitz's trenchant style: "Ha ha funny!", he commented on Clausewitz's statement on strategic defense: "The conqueror is always peaceable; as Bonaparte, too, also stated, he would be quite happy to march quietly into our country. But so that he cannot do that, we must willingly wage war and, therefore, even prepare for it."²

Lenin had thoroughly studied Clausewitz's work Vom Kriege /On War/ during his Swiss exile in the years 1914 to 1916 and had made extracts in a notebook which represented the most important ideas of the Prussian military philosopher. Whoever leafs through these extracts and reads Lenin's marginal notes³ will be astonished to find how strong Clausewitz's influence apparently was on Lenin.

The Truth Is Not in the Systems

Lenin and Clausewitz, who both came from middle-class backgrounds, had a great deal in common: militant idealism, a pronounced sense of responsibility and the spartan unpretentiousness of their personal life style. What linked them in their scholarly work was primarily their strict objectivity, their sense of reality or common sense, as Marx called it. Clausewitz's perception "Where there is no system, there is no truth apparatus, and still there is truth, and this is found mainly only through practiced judgment, the measure of long experience," Lenin annotated with the marginal note: "Truth is not in systems."⁴

How little Lenin held to his own theses in practice was demonstrated in the spring of 1921 at the Tenth Bolshevik Party Congress. According to what he said, the ownership of production means was the real cause of the enslavement of the workers and the peasants. Since the systematic nationalization of industry and agriculture had, however, already led to a catastrophic famine within three years, to which more than five million persons had fallen victim, without a second thought he rescinded the state controls ordained by himself for broad areas of the economy in his "New Economic Policy." And when in March 1921 the trade union-organized strike of workers in Petrograd and the mutiny of the sailors in Kronstadt escalated into the revolution of the proletariat against the dictatorship of the Party leadership, with the "prohibition of fractionalism"⁵ he eliminated the last remnants of party democracy and the right of unions to express opinions. The surviving "counterrevolutionaries" were shot.

Freedom Is Only the Freedom of the Dissenter

What separated Clausewitz from Lenin was their ideological differences. As a friend and student of Scharnhorst, Clausewitz belonged to the inner circle of great reformers who sought to renew Prussia spiritually after the ignominious defeat at Jena and Auerstedt and to free it from the Napoleonic yoke. Under Frederick

*Numbers in the right hand margin indicate pagination in original text.

the Great, Prussia had already gained the reputation of being the most tolerant civilized state of its time. With the Stein/Hardenberg reforms the switches were thrown for a liberal and social development which was to find its crowning conclusion in the basic constitutional law of the Federal Republic of Germany 150 years later.



Carl von Clausewitz im Jahre 1812
(Foto: Archiv MARINEFORUM)

The freedom of conscience of the emancipated citizen protected by the state--that was then also Clausewitz's concept of freedom and human dignity.

Lenin had lost confidence in the liberal world of his fatherland and his belief in God. When his beloved older brother Alexander was sentenced to hang one year after the death of his father for participating in a plot against the Czar, Lenin joined the Communist movement, whose Russian tradition had for ages been marked by a special radicalism.

According to the Communist concept, man is the highest form of life in a material world, in which there is /368 no God; his appointed task is to raise himself and nature in an unending developmental process to a higher stage. This doctrine, which makes it incumbent upon man to serve an ideal while renouncing personal pleasure, has long had a great attraction, especially

for young people. But the Communist ideal was not for the emancipated citizen, but the one who had submitted to his party in blind obedience.

The realization of the Communist ideals in the October Revolution was a throwback to barbarianism. According to a careful estimate of the Times of 1922, the secret state police established by Lenin in December 1917, the notorious Cheka, stifled the voices of more than 1.5 million people in less than four years. With the liquidation of the enemies of the system and the exclusion of any opposition, even within the Party, the warning which Rosa Luxemburg had issued in 1918 was fulfilled: "Without general elections, freedom of the press and the freed assembly and the free exchange of ideas, life in any institution dies away and becomes an empty life in which the bureaucracy alone remains the active element. The elite (the working class are from time to time invited to gatherings in order to applaud the speeches of the leaders and approve resolutions.--Freedom for the followers of the government, only for the members of a party, is not freedom. Freedom is only the freedom of the dissenter."⁶

War is the continuation of politics with other means.⁷ This guiding principle of Clausewitz's doctrine took on special significance for Lenin at the outbreak of the First World War.

Generally, by that it is understood that the military leadership must take its direction from the political leadership, and vice versa, the political leadership must not set any tasks which cannot be performed with existing means. But Clausewitz is much quoted, but little read, and the responsible politicians have too often /369 and frequently enough to the disadvantage of Germany, violated his theses. Thus, the Americans, for example, in the spring of 1945 were conducting only the military aspect "to lick Germany now,"⁸ while Stalin was conducting the war politically, and already by late 1944 had ordered his generals to take Berlin as quickly as possible, because possession of it was of decisive importance for the division of Germany after the war. Hitler led Germany into military and political catastrophe, because in the Russian campaign the Wehrmacht was faced with a mission which could not be accomplished with the available forces. Lenin used Clausewitz's thesis to

analyze the political causes of the First World War and to substantiate his revolutionary notion.

At the Congress of the Second Socialist Internationale in Stuttgart in 1907, the representatives of the Socialist parties at his motion, which he had introduced jointly with Rosa Luxemburg, had solemnly sworn to prevent the outbreak of a war, to end a war which had broken out as quickly as possible and to exploit the political crisis to speed the downfall of capitalistic class rule.⁹ Now, when after the outbreak of the First World War nearly all the Socialist leaders concluded domestic peace with their governments and cried out for the defense of the fatherland, Lenin saw in those actions an ignominious betrayal of the cause of the proletariat. He gave vent to his fury at the German Socialist Kautsky and the Russian Socialist Plekhanov for having sunk to the level of the most vulgar, middle-class chauvinist who refuses to learn or has never known that war is the continuation of politics, that war and politics are linked with the interests of certain classes and that one must study which classes conduct war and for what reasons they do.¹⁰ For him the World War of 1914 was a "continuation of the policy of imperialism, the plundering of foreign nations by the old bourgeoisie of the great powers."¹¹

"Only the Party Knows the Way"

In his work Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism (1916) Lenin presents the view that the national as well as the international exploitation of humanity and countries could be brought to an end only by the Communist Revolution. But he is also persuaded that the revolution in Russia can be won not by the people, but only by the bold surprise attack of the small elite of a powerful party of professional revolutionaries. As early as 1902 he had demanded in his pamphlet What Is to Be Done?: "Give us an organization of revolutionaries, and we shall turn Russia upside down."¹² In Advice of an Outsider, he now challenged his party, in 1917, to resolute action, invoking Marx and Danton: "Marx has summarized the lessons on armed revolt from every revolution with the words of Danton, the greatest known master of revolutionary tactics in this way: boldness, boldness, still more boldness!"¹³

On Boldness

In his resolve to risk everything on one venture, Lenin had been strengthened by Clausewitz. From the sixth chapter of the third book On Boldness, he had noted: "In the large numbers of the cautious there is a considerable majority which is so out of cowardice (Lenin's marginal note: Caution and Cowardice!--heavily underlined--).¹⁴ Even daredevilry, that is boldness without any purpose, is not to be demeaned; basically, it is the same strength of the spirit, only without help from the mind, exercised in a sort of passion. That given an equal degree of reason in war a thousand times more is lost by timidity than by boldness is something we perhaps need only mention in order to be certain of the approval of our reader. The higher we rise in leadership positions the more will intellect, judgment, and reason prevail in the activity, and, therefore, all the more will boldness, a property of the spirit, be relegated to the background, and, therefore, we find it so seldom in the highest places, but it is all the more admirable even then."¹⁵

Lenin converted these ideas of Clausewitz into deeds with the Revolution.

In the spring of 1917, the events in Russia began to follow closely on one another. On 11 March the Czar dissolved the hostile Parliament. In a countermove the Parliament established a provisional government and forced the Czar to abdicate.

On 17 April Lenin returned to Petersburg from Switzerland with the approval of Germany, and in his April theses called immediately for the establishment of the

After the takeover of power, Lenin needed time to reform the forces of the revolution for the solution of the domestic and foreign policy problems overwhelming him. Consonant with Clausewitz's strategic concept of attack and defense--"Defense is nothing but a stronger form of war through which victory will be gained to shift to the offensive after superiority is attained."²¹--Lenin worked for the immediate ending of the war, against the opposition of his party friends, including Trotsky. He was convinced that "the political tactic and the military tactic are two related areas and that the Party functionaries, therefore, would do well to read the works of Clausewitz."²²

In the Central Committee he reproached his enemies: "You are worse than /371 chickens. A chicken is afraid to step outside a circle marked with chalk, but it can be offered in its justification that someone else's hand drew the circle. But you have set up a formula with your own hands, and now you hold rigidly to the formula instead of recognizing reality. For do you not see that the peasant has voted against the war?--With his feet! Well, he is running away from the front."²³

On 7 November his first governmental measure consisted in proclaiming the immediate ending of the war. On 21 November he offered all the belligerent states a ceasefire and a democratic peace without annexations and levies based on the principle of self-determination of nations. And on 3 March 1918 the German-Russian Peace Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was signed, in which Lenin had to surrender one fourth of the Russian territory and three-quarters of the Russian coal and iron industry.

On Leading Troops

Lenin used the short breathing spell after the conclusion of the peace to create together with Trotsky a powerful Red Army imbued with the revolutionary spirit within a few months, strictly organized on the Prussian model, with compulsory military service, an oath of allegiances, a general staff and a military academy. After the first conscription the number of men totalled 500,000 and 40,000 former Czarist officers with combat experience. Political commissars responsible for the political education and military supervision were new.

Here, too, Clausewitz's influence again come to light quite clearly. Lenin had made a note from his work on the need of strict leadership: "Without an authoritative, uncompromising will which filters down to the last member, a good military leadership is not possible, and whoever would follow the custom of always believing and expecting the best of people would thereby be unfit for good military leadership (marginal note by Lenin: 'A good leader--and mistrust of people', "²⁴

On esprit de corps, he said: "However carefully one may feel he has trained the citizen and the fighter into one and the same individual, never will the individuality of the routine be able to be abandoned, and, therefore, those who conduct it [i.e., the training] will regard themselves as a sort of guild in whose orders, laws, and customs the esprit de corps of war are established. One would, therefore, be unjustified to underestimate the esprit de corps."²⁵

And on revolutionary élan: "Since Bonaparte, war has assumed quite another nature.. thus, the martial element was loosed in all its natural power."²⁶ The tremendous effects of the French Revolution are, however, apparently to be sought much less in the new means of its warfare than in the completely altered politics and the condition of the people."²⁷ (Lenin's marginal note: "important--energy and enthusiasm of the people"). Last but not least, for that reason Lenin had already on 9 November 1917 provided for the confiscation of the lands of the landlords and the production enterprises for the benefit of the people in order to inspire the exhausted workers and peasants for his new war. The result proved him right.

the dictatorship of the proletariat, which was to be founded not on law, not on the will of the majority, but exclusively on power.¹⁶ Bogdanov, a former Bolshevik, explained Lenin's theses as the rantings of a madman.¹⁷ Even Lenin's Party friends turned against him. But Lenin won over Trotsky as an ally and they won out in his Party. In July, Kerensky, the head of the provisional government, issued an arrest order for Lenin and Trotsky. Both had to go underground again. In the meantime, the Bolshevik Party had grown from 80,000 to 240,000 in four months. At the sixth Party Congress Lenin and Trotsky along with two other Central Committee members were elected to lead the Party. The time was ripe; on 7 November the Bolsheviks under Trotsky's and Lenin's leadership went on the offensive. The assault on the Winter Palace began with fire from the cruiser AURORA. Kerensky's government was captured in a surprise attack. That was Lenin's victory. He said to Trotsky smilingly: "the change from illegality, from being knocked about, to power is too abrupt," and he added in German: "It makes your head spin."¹⁸

Any attempt to guide the revolution into democratic paths at the last moment were doomed to failure.



Photograph: Lenin (actually Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov), founder of the Union of Socialist Republics (Marineforum archives photo)

On 8 November the moderate Socialists and the Mensheviks (the Minority), despite their overwhelming vote majority walked out of the All-Russian Soviet Congress in protest against Lenin's single-handed effort, followed by Trotsky's derisive shouts that they had fallen into the rubbish pile of history.¹⁹ The remaining Bolsheviks (the Majority) elected Lenin Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars. Lenin had agreed with Trotsky on this designation for the post of head of government: "That smells of revolution!"²⁰

When the constituent assembly convoked though grudgingly by Lenin on 14 January 1918 formally proclaimed the democratic republic with a majority against the votes of the Bolsheviks and the Socialists, Lenin--faithful to Danton's dictum on boldness--abruptly dissolved the constituent assembly by force of arms and proclaimed the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Thus, Lenin had changed the world and laid the cornerstone for a communist empire which today is at the point of becoming a very powerful political power.

Defense is the Strongest Form of War

The Victories of the Red Army

Just a short time later, Lenin was able to shift again from the defensive to the offensive. With his army he succeeded in defeating after three years of hard fighting the intervention troops of the Allies attacking on all sides and the White Russian armies and to reconquer nearly entirely all the territory surrendered in the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaties, with the exception of Poland, Finland, and the Baltic States. That is a feat which allows comparison in every respect with Frederick the Great, about whom Clausewitz had written: "If there is joined with this energy of the forces a wise moderation in the goals set, then this interplay of brilliant blows and cautious restraint results which we must admire in Frederick the Great."²⁸

Clausewitz had written about Napoleon's victories that the victories of the revolution were mainly the consequences of a defective policy of the regimes opposing it, which tried to keep in balance with conventional means forces which were new and overwhelming.²⁹ Certainly, this is true also for Lenin's victories and for the successes of Soviet policy in our day.

No World Power without Seapower

Today, sixty years after the victories of the Red Army under Lenin, the Soviet Union has developed into the most powerful land power and is about to challenge the USA and its allies as the leading seapower.

Admiral Gorshkov, the Commander in Chief of the Soviet naval forces, now 71 years of age, has occasionally been called "the Red Tirpitz." German Chancellor Schmidt has called him "the greatest military genius in the world today."



Photograph: Sergei Gorshkov, Fleet Admiral of the Soviet Union, Commander in Chief of the Soviet Navy

Box top page 371: Quotation: The ideas of people and fatherland are a part of our being, and no one can cast them off.....
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

In his book The Role of the Navies in Peace and War³⁰ Gorshkov proves by /372 example of Spain, the Netherlands, France, Great Britain, and the USA, that the rise of a nation to a world power begins with the struggle for superiority at sea and ends with the loss of that superiority.

His book is an interesting presentation of the history of naval warfare, informative especially because it gives a behind-the-scenes look at Soviet international policy and also worth reading because it analyzes all the political and the military questions of seapower perceptively and, despite a certain ideological lacing, probes matters thoroughly.

The military mission of the navy was and always has been to disrupt enemy shipping lanes and to protect one's own,³¹ and in peace, to exert political pressure without the direct employment of weapons.³² Gorshkov sees the supernatural, revolutionary mission of the Red Fleet in "creating favorable conditions for the expansion of Socialism and of Communism."³³

Gorshkov has applied the military doctrine developed by Lenin to Soviet naval armament in a consistent continuation of Clausewitz's ideas; he paid tribute to Lenin's importance with the following words: "In the age of the technological revolution, of the creation of basically new military forces, of the building of an ocean-going fleet, Lenin's principles have proved of ever-growing significance to us...The vital importance of this art consists especially in its creative and scientific character, in the precise calculation of the laws of armed warfare, in the ability to determine the focal points of the war as well as to determine the time, place, and type of decisive attack to be conducted and also to utilize the tremendous revolutionary energy, the initiative, and the enthusiasm of the people."³⁴

Like Lenin, Gorshkov is of the opinion that it would be unreasonable, yes, even criminal, not to possess all the combat means the enemy has or could have.³⁵ And yet he is guarding against copying the fleet construction program of the West.³⁶

The Soviet Union, he writes, has embarked on a course of building a deep-sea navy whose basic component is the nuclear-powered submarine for different purposes.³⁷ Submarines were the main weapons against enemy shipping in the First and Second World Wars, so under present-day conditions they would have all the more to recommend them for that purpose. Churchill stated that the only thing he really feared in the war was the German submarine.³⁹ Submarine warfare had destroyed 65 percent of British prewar tonnage.⁴⁰ A total of six million men had been employed in the struggle against German submarines. For every combat submarine there were 100 antisubmarine ships and 400 aircraft. How great would the odds have to be to combat nuclear submarines today!⁴¹

But a modern navy should not be only an underwater navy.⁴² The inadequate support of the German combat submarines by German aviation and surface ships made the German leadership pay dearly in the two world wars, and is one of the reasons for the failure of the unrestricted submarine warfare conducted by the Germans. Despite the extraordinary threat to the German combat submarines, not a single specially targeted operation to destroy the antisubmarine forces was undertaken by the German High Command.

Therefore, the Soviet Union also needs surface ships for various purposes.⁴⁴ In view of the possibility today of employing combat means in colossal strength against enemy naval forces, irrespective of whether they should be at sea or in their bases, the old formula of first strike takes on new meaning.⁴⁵

Whether the USA and NATO can keep pace with the growth of Soviet naval armament and establish a balance of power appears uncertain.

Our Course Means Peace

The desire and the wish of people in the West is to maintain peace. In the West the power of the state derives from the people. Therefore, peace is not being threatened by the Western democracies.

However, the unaltered goal of the Soviet Union and of her satellites is the spread of Communism to the whole world with any means of the revolutionary struggle. The people in the East have no influence on the policy of their authoritarian governments. As long as the Soviet Union sticks to its goal of world revolution, there is a constant danger of war from the East Bloc.

Therefore, the West can prevent a war only by military deterrence and by a policy of balance of power.

As Clausewitz wrote over 150 years ago, through the balance of power one accepts the influence of the political purpose on war. Thus, one would have to deign to engage in wars which consist only in the threat from the enemy. The whole art of war is then transformed into simple caution, and this will be directed mainly toward seeing that the fluctuating balance does not turn suddenly to our disadvantage, and a half war turn into a full-scale war.⁴⁶

FOOTNOTES

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39. Gorshkov, loc. cit., p. 135
40. Gorshkov, loc. cit., p. 71
41. Gorshkov, loc. cit., p. 138
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43. Gorshkov, loc. cit., pp. 136, 176
44. Gorshkov, loc. cit., p. 176
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46. Clausewitz, loc. cit., p. 989

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